

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW  
OF  
FILIPE GONZALEZ**

**19 PAGES  
(INCLUDING COVER)**

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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In the Matter of: \*  
\*  
FIRE ON BOARD THE \*  
U.S. PASSENGER VESSEL \*  
PORT IMPERIAL MANHATTAN \*  
NOVEMBER 17, 2000 \*  
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Monday,  
November 20, 2000

INTERVIEW OF:

FELIPE GONZALEZ

This interview was conducted by Donald J. Tyrrell, Investigator-in-Charge, National Transportation Safety Board, Office of Marine Safety, 490 L'Enfant Plaza East, Washington, D.C. 20594.

Other Persons Present

In addition to the person being interviewed, the following individuals were also present during the interview:

Name	Representing	Address	Telephone
Peter Johansen	NY Waterway	Senior Director of Marine Operations NY Waterway Pershing Road Weehawken, N.J. 07087	201-902-8841
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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TYRRELL: Today is Monday the 20th of November. The time is 2:55 p.m.

I would like to first start out with some general background information.

Give me your full name?

MR. GONZALEZ: Felipe Gonzalez.

MR. TYRRELL: Felipe Gonzalez.

MR. GONZALEZ: Yes.

MR. TYRRELL: Okay. Felipe, how old are you?

MR. GONZALEZ: I am 20.

MR. TYRRELL: Twenty. Okay. And your current job?

MR. GONZALEZ: My current job, graduated from high school and I started working here.

MR. TYRRELL: Okay. And you are a deckhand?

MR. GONZALEZ: Yes.

MR. TYRRELL: Okay. How long have you worked for New York Waterways?

MR. BROWN: A year and seven months.

MR. TYRRELL: And before that you were in high school?

MR. GONZALEZ: Yes, sir.

MR. TYRRELL: Okay. Do you have any Coast Guard documents, any seaman papers or licenses?

1 MR. GONZALEZ: I have, I don't have, my  
2 management has a senior deckhand papers saying that you  
3 are allowed to drive the boat and, you know, in case of  
4 an emergency. Anything happens to the captain, you are  
5 allowed to grab the wheel and dock the boat.

6 MR. TYRRELL: Do you have anything that the  
7 Coast Guard gave you?

8 MR. GONZALEZ: No, sir.

9 MR. TYRRELL: Okay. Could you run me through  
10 your day, the day of the fire happened, starting when  
11 you arrived at work and you know, what you did and when  
12 you first realized that there was a problem and, you  
13 know, kind of take me through, you know, what happened  
14 to you until you got off the boat?

15 MR. GONZALEZ: I normally get on the boat at  
16 2:30. And Captain, he goes upstairs to start up the  
17 boat, and he puts one of the deckhands driving and he  
18 goes down the engine room and checks the, checks the  
19 engine room himself. He wants to see what is  
20 happening, and he does it himself. And then like every  
21 half hour, I will, we go check the engine room for  
22 ourselves, to make sure everything is okay. Check the  
23 gauges, transmission, you know, that sort of stuff.

24 And that day, we were on 38th Street, we  
25 turned the boat around at 6:23, six something, and --

1 He turned the boat around and the Captain said, I got  
2 to take over the boat, and because he wanted to eat.  
3 And I went on the wheel, I started off and I noticed  
4 that mostly when I am hooking up the boat, like  
5 gradually, hooking up, I noticed I was suddenly losing  
6 air. And when I went to tell the Captain, he told me  
7 about the smoke. He told me that he noticed smoke  
8 coming out of the port side vents. And right away, he  
9 told me to go downstairs, right away I went downstairs.

10 I opened the door and I told the other deckhand, there  
11 is something wrong with the engine room. I am not sure  
12 what it is, there is smoke coming out. And I opened  
13 the door and I could see flames coming out and smoke  
14 and I got electrocuted on my hand. And I feel a sharp,  
15 and the other deckhand passed me the extinguisher. And  
16 I tried to put out the fire.

17 And first of all, before I opened the door,  
18 and I closed it again because I knew there was a  
19 passenger behind me. There was a passenger behind me.

20 He was sitting there. And I told him to go the bow  
21 because we have a problem, a slight problem in the  
22 engine room, and he got up and went to the bow. And  
23 the other, everybody, we told announcement everybody  
24 stay in the bow, because we have a slight problem. So,  
25 then I grabbed the extinguisher, opened the door and

1     tried to put out the fire, tried to do as best as we  
2     can. And then when I finished with that, I closed the  
3     door and the other deckhand, I think he went upstairs  
4     and told the Captain what was going on. And he came  
5     back down with, I think he got, yeah, the port  
6     extinguisher, on the bow and he tried to do it, and I  
7     went upstairs. And then the Captain said, you know, he  
8     wanted to check it out, so he left me in charge of, on  
9     the wheel, again, and he went downstairs and checked,  
10    was checking out the situation for himself.

11           And then, let's see -- He reminded me that I  
12    had my cell phone, because we didn't have, radios went  
13    out, everything went out. So, the only thing that was  
14    working was our radar. And we needed a radio, so I  
15    guess he reminded me that I had my cell phone, so I  
16    dialed 911, and so I called and I was telling the  
17    operator what the situation was, where we were at, and  
18    then I started calling the management, whoever I had on  
19    my cell phone, I started calling management. And from  
20    there, I tried to advise as many people as I can that  
21    worked for the company, and so. And from there on, I  
22    noticed the other deckhand came with our life jackets  
23    and gave them to the passengers. And he was helping  
24    them put them on. And the Captain came up, back  
25    upstairs, he says the problem was getting pretty

1       serious. We looked back, and the vents were, a lot of  
2       smoke was coming out the vents. So, you can't even  
3       close the vents, so, you know, it was just --

4               MR. TYRRELL: Take your time.

5               MR. GONZALEZ: And then, I guess, the Captain  
6       was giving orders saying that he sees the problem as  
7       pretty bad, so, I guess wanted to get the life rafts.  
8       So, we went, I stayed on the wheel, and I was right  
9       there, I was like actually, the door was open, so I was  
10      watching everything that was happening. The passengers  
11      on that bow of the boat, most of them were calm, like  
12      confused, but that is normal for anybody, but I guess,  
13      the other deckhand, Coky, he went upstairs, and tried  
14      to get the life rafts, but he couldn't do them himself  
15      and the Captain was down by me, like between the wheel  
16      house and, we couldn't, the life rafts were too high  
17      up, so we got one of the, one of the passengers  
18      actually, we needed assistance. It looked like we  
19      needed assistance, so, I told him that the stairway to  
20      the top, I showed him the way to get up there, and you  
21      know, I needed assistance, why not ask the passenger.  
22      So, he started helping us. He started bringing them  
23      down. And I came out of the wheel house. We started,  
24      I started bringing, helping out the Captain, so we can,  
25      just Captain, it is a pretty heavy rafts.



1 MR. TYRRELL: Right.

2 MR. GONZALEZ: And then so we brought three of  
3 them back down. And then we brought three down. We  
4 brought the man overboard ladder, in case anything, and  
5 we had, flipped the man overboard ladder so you can go  
6 out to the rafts. And I shut doors, the smoke was  
7 coming out on the passengers, some of them were  
8 coughing. So, I shut the doors, and I noticed the  
9 Celestial, one of the boats is putting the spotlight  
10 towards us, so, that was helping us, you know, seeing  
11 more because everything was pitch black -- especially  
12 with the smoke, so that was helping us with that. And  
13 then we noticed that another boat was coming. So, that  
14 is -- The boat bowed up, when he bowed up, well,  
15 actually we took out the man overboard ladder, and he  
16 bowed up.

17 MR. TYRRELL: Bow to bow?

18 MR. GONZALEZ: By the bow. And we transferred  
19 the passengers first and then the crew left. And then  
20 we ended up in ferry and we dropped off the passengers.

21 Well, we made sure the passengers were okay and  
22 everything. And we asked anybody if they needed  
23 medical attention, they would get it on the other side.

24 MR. TYRRELL: Did any of the passengers  
25 complain that they were injured?

1                   MR. GONZALEZ: No, just one made a smart  
2 comment that he wanted his five dollars back.

3                   MR. TYRRELL: He what?

4                   MR. GONZALEZ: He wanted his five dollars  
5 back.

6                   MR. TYRRELL: Okay.

7                   MR. GONZALEZ: Most of them shook our hands  
8 and said that we did a good job.

9                   MR. TYRRELL: Did the, at any time did the  
10 passengers seem to be panicking or did they seem calm  
11 most of the time?

12                   MR. GONZALEZ: Like, they panicked, there was  
13 a moment they panicked, like when the boat was getting  
14 closer, I guess, there was an extinguisher that blew  
15 up, so, at that moment, the passengers panicked. And  
16 one of them tried to go over the rail. And I grabbed  
17 him and I told him there is a boat coming right in  
18 front of us, don't, just be calm and this and that.  
19 One of them just panicked like that, and I brought them  
20 over to the other side. So --

21                   MR. TYRRELL: Were all -- Go ahead, I am  
22 sorry.

23                   MR. GONZALEZ: And we just waited until the  
24 other boat came by.

25                   MR. TYRRELL: Were all the passengers wearing

1 life jackets?

2 MR. GONZALEZ: All of them. The other  
3 deckhand offered them all. Life preserver, the jacket  
4 you wear, so he offered them that one, so, I guess,  
5 most life preservers are on the stern where the fire  
6 was at. So, it was pretty dark to go back there.

7 MR. TYRRELL: Sure, sure.

8 MR. GONZALEZ: And at the beginning we sent  
9 all the passengers to the bow.

10 MR. TYRRELL: Right.

11 MR. GONZALEZ: So, we didn't know what  
12 situation we had until, you know, the fire just went  
13 quickly.

14 MR. TYRRELL: Right.

15 MR. GONZALEZ: Everything went quick, quickly.

16 MR. TYRRELL: When was the last time that you  
17 were in the engine room before the fire?

18 MR. GONZALEZ: The last time? The other  
19 deckhand, he went one run before, than I did. Like you  
20 do every half hour, I went on that run, I can't really  
21 say what time it was, because I didn't really pay any  
22 attention to the time. But, like the Captain went  
23 first and then I went, and then the other deckhand.

24 MR. TYRRELL: Okay.

25 MR. GONZALEZ: So, that is how, we take turns

1       like that so we all rotate and watch the engine room  
2       for ourselves. Everybody has their different way of  
3       walking through and seeing.

4               MR. TYRRELL: What do you do when you go in  
5       the engine room, what do you look for?

6               MR. GONZALEZ: I go, I look at the  
7       compressors, I look at the engines, make sure the  
8       temperatures are okay for the water jacket-- Look at  
9       the generator. Make sure everything is okay, you know,  
10      and nothing is, you don't smell nothing bad, no fumes,  
11      no leaks, anything like that.

12              MR. TYRRELL: When you were in there, the last  
13      time you were in there before the fire, everything look  
14      okay?

15              MR. GONZALEZ: Everything looked okay.

16              MR. TYRRELL: All right.

17              MR. GONZALEZ: In my opinion, when I opened  
18      the door, most of it was coming behind the stairs.

19              MR. TYRRELL: Okay.

20              MR. GONZALEZ: The fire was just coming behind  
21      the stairs and there was no way to go, I wasn't even  
22      going to try --

23              MR. TYRRELL: That is the only way in?

24              MR. GONZALEZ: I see smoke coming out and I  
25      just closed that door.

1 MR. TYRRELL: Anything else you know about  
2 this?

3 MR. GONZALEZ: Everything just passed so fast.

4 MR. TYRRELL: Yes.

5 MR. GONZALEZ: It was like things happened so  
6 fast, sometimes you remember, sometimes you don't, I  
7 can't really say. Some things has to be --

8 MR. TYRRELL: Would you mind if I checked with  
9 in about a week or so and see if you are remember  
10 anything else?

11 MR. GONZALEZ: No problem.

12 MR. TYRRELL: Can you give me a phone number  
13 where I can reach you?

14 MR. GONZALEZ: I think my cell phone would be  
15 the best. That is (201).

16 MR. TYRRELL: Two, oh, one.

17 MR. GONZALEZ: Eight, three, eight.

18 MR. TYRRELL: Eight, three, eight.

19 MR. GONZALEZ: Four, seven.

20 MR. TYRRELL: Four, seven.

21 MR. GONZALEZ: Six, seven.

22 MR. TYRRELL: Six, seven. Okay. I will call  
23 you in a week or so and if you remember anything else,  
24 anything, I wish I had told him that, you know, I would  
25 be happy to hear it.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (inaudible)

2 MR. GONZALEZ: Like a straight shot, like when  
3 you really got electrocuted, it was just like little  
4 shocks jumping into your hand. Not like a steady  
5 shock, you know, just grab on and just keeps your body  
6 into it. It is just little shocks. And when I started  
7 spraying the extinguisher, I started getting shocks in  
8 the other hand.

9 MR. TYRRELL: Now, was that from touching the  
10 door or the door frame?

11 MR. GONZALEZ: No, the door, first when I  
12 opened the door I got the shock.

13 MR. TYRRELL: From the door handle?

14 MR. GONZALEZ: The handle. Yes, door handle,  
15 I opened it, I got the shock. That is the first shock  
16 I got. And then the other deckhand, he got the shock,  
17 too, because he was around me. And then I was holding  
18 it with my boot, I left the door with my boot and I was  
19 doing the extinguisher.

20 MR. TYRRELL: And where, you were getting the  
21 shock through your boot?

22 MR. GONZALEZ: No, I was getting the shock  
23 through the extinguisher. I don't know how, but you  
24 could see like shocks going through, you could actually  
25 see them. And you see the flames right there, and you

1 see the shocks, and you see the smoke.

2 MR. TYRRELL: What type of fire extinguishers  
3 was it that you were using? Was it a CO2 or was a dry  
4 chemical?

5 MR. GONZALEZ: It was a CO2.

6 MR. TYRRELL: CO2.

7 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes. I grabbed the first  
8 extinguisher I saw in the stern. There is that one,  
9 and there is another one on the bow.

10 MR. TYRRELL: Do you know if, how long have  
11 you been on the Manhattan?

12 MR. GONZALEZ: Manhattan, I worked on it  
13 before, but like, in shifts, I mean, I changed my  
14 shifts, and I just started a new shift this week, so,  
15 this whole week I was on the Manhattan. So, that was, I  
16 started my new shift.

17 MR. TYRRELL: Was it, what kind of reputation  
18 does it have in the fleet, in your company? Was it one  
19 of the better boats or would, is it, how does it fit,  
20 if you would compare it to, before the fire, not now,  
21 would it be average, above average, below average?

22 MR. GONZALEZ: It was, it doesn't have as  
23 many, many advanced stuff as the other boats. That is  
24 the only thing.

25 MR. TYRRELL: Because it is a little older?

1 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes, it is a little older. The  
2 other ones, you know, have more advanced stuff, you  
3 know, like everything is like set to do everything.  
4 This boat you like have to -- like give it the --  
5 oxygen out -- like for the vents, something automatic  
6 that it closes the vents. We tried to close the vents,  
7 you have to pick them up and get all that smoke in your  
8 face, and the vents are hot.

9 MR. TYRRELL: Did you try and close these  
10 vents?

11 MR. GONZALEZ: No, it was too much smoke.

12 MR. TYRRELL: Too much smoke.

13 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes. I was coughing enough.

14 MR. TYRRELL: Yes.

15 MR. GONZALEZ: By the time I went upstairs,  
16 everything just, it was a couple of minutes after --

17 MR. TYRRELL: Is this the type of vent where  
18 you have to pull, hold the cover up and then tighten  
19 the --

20 MR. GONZALEZ: The vent, the vent in the  
21 middle, you have to pull up the cover, and then put the  
22 screws on, so you screw it on.

23 MR. TYRRELL: Right.

24 MR. GONZALEZ: And in the side, port and  
25 starboard, you have to unscrew it in the side and flip,



1 some of them are rubber and little rubber latch, and  
2 you know, that is pretty hot, it is just going to melt.

3 MR. TYRRELL: Yes. The vents on the side, they  
4 go down to the engine room?

5 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes, sir.

6 MR. TYRRELL: The one in the center?

7 MR. GONZALEZ: It goes right to the engine  
8 room too.

9 MR. TYRRELL: It goes to the engine room, too?

10 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes.

11 MR. TYRRELL: That is where the engine  
12 room door?

13 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes, the engine room door, that  
14 is the principal, and the other ones go from each end.

15 MR. TYRRELL: Okay. Okay.

16 MR. GONZALEZ: Each vent has like, well, port  
17 and starboard has each individual site.

18 MR. TYRRELL: Okay.

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You noticed it first in  
20 the --

21 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes.

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Did you try steering,  
23 you know, at what point did you notice that your  
24 steering was --

25 MR. GONZALEZ: My steering? At that point the

1 steering was, the steering was good. I just noticed  
2 the throttle went down. When I came back upstairs,  
3 everything, like everything was already blacked out,  
4 because it happened when the Captain was there and I  
5 was downstairs doing that, and when I came back  
6 upstairs, he went downstairs, I noticed the steering  
7 started going like, it didn't want to stop, it just  
8 started going to one side only. And you tried to grab  
9 it and it stops and then you let it go, it just goes to  
10 one side only, going to the left side.

11 MR. TYRRELL: The wheel was turning --

12 MR. GONZALEZ: By itself.

13 MR. TYRRELL: To the left.

14 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes. To the left side.

15 SPEAKER: (inaudible)

16 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What about the, you  
18 mentioned that the VHF was off but the radar was on.

19 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: How long did the radar  
21 stay on?

22 MR. GONZALEZ: I can't really say, I was, I  
23 was talking on the phone and I was talking to one of  
24 the managers, and he was telling to make sure that is  
25 not a CO2, just make sure, and I was looking all over

1 for it and I didn't find it. And when I looked back up,  
2 the radar was off. So, I can't really say how long.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (inaudible.)

4 MR. TYRRELL: How did you call from the,  
5 ashore? I mean, do you recall the, who specifically it  
6 was that you called?

7 MR. GONZALEZ: At that moment?

8 MR. TYRRELL: Yes.

9 MR. GONZALEZ: Oh, Allen.

10 MR. TYRRELL: Allen.

11 MR. GONZALEZ: Yes, yes, one of the managers.

12 MR. TYRRELL: Okay.

13 MR. GONZALEZ: My cell phone, it says -- well,  
14 I guess Allen was in his office and picked up and that  
15 is the person I started to talking to, and I told him,  
16 I told him what was happening and my phone started  
17 breaking up and we lost contact.

18 MR. TYRRELL: All right. Okay. Well, I can't  
19 think of any other question to ask you. Maybe I will  
20 later. Thanks a lot.

21 Does anybody else have any more questions?

22 Okay. Thank you very much.

23 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)